Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

March 2, 1998

1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
    Fisheries Division
    Endangered Species Coordinator
    Nongame Coordinator
    Missoula Office
Montana State Library
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
North Powell Conservation District
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
Montana State Library, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
John Krutar, 4981 Highway 200, Ovando, MT 59854
Thomas Rue, P.O. Box 1209, Bonner, MT 59823
Land and Water Consulting Inc.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for a Future Fisheries Project tentatively planned to restore stream channel dimensions and create fish habitat features in Kleinschmidt Creek located near the town of Ovando.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5 P.M., April 1, 1998 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division

Powell

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Kleinschmidt Creek Fish Habitat Enhancement Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 which directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purposes of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. This project is being proposed to restore stream channel dimensions and create fish habitat on a 2,500 foot reach of Kleinschmidt Creek, a spring creek located near the town of Ovando.

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Kleinschmidt Creek near the town of Ovando within Township 14 North, Range 11 West, Section 5 in Powell County.

II. Need for the Project: Department Goal A indicates that a Fisheries Division objective is to "protect existing aquatic habitat and improve degraded stream systems for the welfare of healthy fish populations and other wildlife species and for public enjoyment and use." The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is a tool to help achieve that objective.

Past livestock use within the proposed project area has removed most of the woody riparian vegetation and has resulted in the trampling of the stream banks causing an over widened and shallow channel. Currently, the degraded condition of the channel provides poor habitat for fish. Kleinschmidt Creek is a tributary to the North Fork of the Blackfoot River and restoration of this reach of stream would create spawning and rearing habitat that would be expected to be used by trout residing both in the stream and in the river.

III. Scope of the Project:

The proposal calls for permanently excluding livestock from the riparian area by constructing a jack-leg fence along the stream. Channel restoration on approximately 2,500 feet of stream would include constructing a more narrow and deep channel and building point bars to increase channel sinuosity. Newly created pools and riffles would provide holding water and cover for adult trout and would provide appropriate water velocities and substrate for spawning habitat, respectively. Additional improvements would include the installation of 2 to 4 rootwads per meander bend for bank stability and cover, trans-planting mature willow clumps within the riparian zone, placing sod mats on newly excavated stream banks and placing 30 to 50 rocks in mid-channel to create holding water for adult fish. The project is expected to cost $44,850.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to $25,500.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Removing the perturbations of livestock grazing within the riparian zone and constructing a more narrow, sinuous and deep channel is expected to create a more diverse and healthy habitat for aquatic life. Expected improvements in aqautic habitat should enhance resident trout populations as well as increase the recruitment of trout to the North Fork of the Blackfoot River. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife would also be improved through the restoration of the riparian vegetative community.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during a low flow period and operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. A permit for a short term exemption from turbidity will be obtained from the Water Quality Bureau and a 310 permit will be obtained from the local Conservation District. In the long term, removing the perturbations of livestock grazing from within the riparian zone and restoring the riparian vegetative community would reduce the sediment contribution to downstream areas, thereby improving the overall quality of downstream waters.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

No effects on geology and soils are expected above the high water mark. Below the high water mark, the project is expected to create a more stable stream channel. Sediment removed from the channel would be placed on newly created point bars and re-vegetated.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be improved by stabilizing the stream channel and by extensive revegetation efforts through planting of native trees, shrubs and grasses.

5. Aesthetics.

Aesthetics would be enhanced by restoring a degraded reach of stream to a healthy and more natural stream environment. The stream reach would be restored by using channel dimensions similar to those obtained from an undisturbed reach of stream and by re-establishing a healthy riparian vegetative community.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project will likely require an individual Army Corp of Engineers (COE) 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office has been contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The

project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

It is anticipated that restoration of this reach of Kleinschmidt Creek would improve spawning and rearing habitat and, as a result, would provide greater recruitment to the North Fork of the Blackfoot River. The recreational fishery in the North Fork of the Blackfoot River would be improved because of this increased recruitment.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this reach of Kleinschmidt Creek will remain degraded, fish populations will remain low and recruitment to the North Fork of the Blackfoot River will remain marginal. In addition, habitat for riparian dependent wildlife will remain in a degraded condition. Recreational opportunities associated with fish and wildlife resources will remain reduced and aesthetics will continue to be impaired.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to remove perturbations of livestock grazing within the riparian zone, construct a more narrow, sinuous and deep stream channel and enhance salmonid habitat. These activities would restore the riparian vegetative community and create more diverse habitat for aquatic life and riparian dependent wildlife. This alternative would improve fish and wildlife habitat, aesthetics and water quality within the project area and would be expected to increase recruitment of salmonids to the North Fork of the Blackfoot River.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. Level of public involvement.

The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future Fisheries Improvement program. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and will be contingent upon their approval. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA will be published on

the Montana Electronic Bulletin Board.

3. Duration of comment period?

   Public comment will be accepted through 5 P.M. on April 1, 1998.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

   Mark Lere, Program Officer
   Habitat Protection Bureau
   Fisheries Division
   Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
   1420 East 6th Avenue
   Helena, MT 59620

   Telephone: (406) 444-2432

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title Kleinschmidt Creek Fish Habitat Enhancement Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project The project is being proposed to restore stream channel dimensions and create fish habitat on a 2,500 foot degraded reach of Kleinschmidt Creek, a spring creek located near the town of Ovando.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats		X				X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality			X			X
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				X		
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals				X		
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping

jurisdiction North Powell Conservation District, NRCS, Army Corp of Engineers

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Land and Water Consulting, Inc.

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by : Mark Lere

Date: March 2, 1998